



inform **contact**

NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

No.70

October-December 2010

CIS UNIONS FOR DECENT WORK

In a special statement, the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) called on trade unions in the CIS countries to mark the World Day for Decent Work 7 October 2011 under the common slogan «Make Decent Work the Main Priority of State Economic and Social Policies!»

Responding to the appeal, trade unions throughout the Commonwealth organised various actions in the form of marches, rallies, meetings, conferences, signature collection, and picketing outside the houses of local governments and enterprises that are known for delaying wages, etc. Participants demanded that the governments respect the rights of workers and their unions, conduct responsible social policies, ensure full and productive employment, take efficient measures to eliminate poverty, raise wages and pensions substantially, rebuff resolutely the arbitrary pricing policies of TNCs, introduce

equitable taxes, and ban all kinds of inequality, social exclusion and discrimination.

In the course of the events, the GCTU and its member organisations also demanded that concrete measures should be taken in CIS states to overcome the economic crisis without serious harm to the social sphere, and that the principles of decent work should be observed in the spirit of social dialogue.

GCTU REJECTS PAID EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

A trade union delegation headed by GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov took part in the 35th Plenary Session of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (IPA) held 28 October 2010 at the Taurida Palace of St. Petersburg. The discussion concentrated mainly on the problem of stronger legislative support for innovative development in the Commonwealth countries.

What the unions thought worth particular attention, was the discussion and adoption of the framework law «On the Activity of Private Employment Agencies». Already at the three-year development stage, the GCTU had succeeded in getting the provisions on agency contract labour and on civil law contracts in labour relations excluded from the text of the draft law. However, the union proposal that services rendered to jobseekers by Private Employment Agencies should be made free of charge as stipulated in ILO Convention No. 181 did not meet with the desired approval. The Assembly decided to refer the issue to the competence of national legislation. The draft framework law was approved in this wording despite the energetic intervention by Vladimir Scherbakov who called on the legislators to make the law consistent with the international labour standard.

The GCTU believes the non-observance of this standard to be in conflict with international commitments made by CIS countries. In this context, on the day after the Assembly session GCTU General Secretary sent a letter to IPA Speaker Sergey Mironov requesting that a respective amendment be introduced in the text of the draft law at the stage of its finalising by the editorial committee.

GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN BAKU

A session of the GCTU Executive Committee was held 23 November

2010 in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. The meeting was opened and chaired by GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov, the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia.

After a welcome speech by President of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation Sattar Mekhbaliyev, participants heard a report on the role of the country's trade unions in the development of social dialogue. The Executive Committee recommended GCTU affiliates to use the Azerbaijani experience in their practical activities, and, in particular, make social dialogue and collective bargaining an effective tool of protecting workers' rights and interests, and attaining decent living standards.

Several leaders of GCTU affiliated organisations told the session of the work they had done to bring the minimum wages up to the level of the subsistence minimum (minimum consumer budget). Following the discussion, the Executive Committee recommended that the national trade union centres and the industry Trade Union Internationals maintain the momentum of the international solidarity campaign «Minimum Wages at Least Equal to the Subsistence Minimum!».

The Session adopted an appeal to the CIS Heads of State «Minimum Pay a Most Important State Social Guarantee» saying that the minimum wages in CIS countries are unacceptably low, ranging from 11 to 142 USD a month. Practically

everywhere in the region (with the exception of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine) they are below the subsistence minimum level, i.e. below the threshold of biological survival. The GCTU called on the Heads of State to do their utmost to make the minimum pay a real state guarantee.

The Executive Committee approved of the report on safety and health in the Commonwealth countries prepared jointly by the GCTU and the CIS Interstate Statistical Committee. After it has been finalised in the light of the discussion, the report will be sent to the CIS Heads of Government, the Inter-Parliamentary Assemblies of the CIS and the Eurasec, and also to the ILO, the ISSA, etc.

Upon considering the outcome of the third World Day for Decent Work in CIS countries, the Executive noted that the participation of GCTU affiliates in the observation of the Day had, once again, proven their commitment to the principles of international trade union solidarity and the common objectives of the international trade union movement. The GCTU will take further steps to promote the Decent Work Agenda in the CIS, and monitor the ratification and strict observance of fundamental ILO Conventions in the Commonwealth countries.

In his closing statement, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov summed up the work done by the GCTU in 2010 and outlined the immediate tasks to be addressed by the unions in the period to come.

KAZAKHSTAN PRESIDENT GETS GCTU GOLD MEDAL

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov presented the highest GCTU award, the Gold Medal «For Services to the Trade Union Movement», to the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Mr Nazarbayev is the only among the presidents of CIS countries who has got the medal. The motive behind his awarding was his «efficient long-term activity to preserve and develop economic, social and political integration in the CIS, consistent and active assistance to the national and regional trade union movements, and promotion of social dialogue aiming to protect workers' rights and interests».

«Kazakhstan has been resolving a lot of social problems in a dynamic step-by-step way. This fact was behind our decision on the award», Vladimir Scherbakov told a press briefing

ARMENIA: FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP

The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) jointly with the National Employers' Union held the first national conference on social partnership involving the CTUA leaders and the presidents of industrial trade unions.

The Conference was about the progress, challenges and further

development of social partnership. Participants agreed that the exchange of opinions they had would help improve the practical application of social partnership and contribute to a more efficient prevention and settlement of labour conflicts.

BELARUS SIGNS GENERAL AGREEMENT

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) and its social partners signed a General Agreement for 2011–2013 taking into account almost all the trade union proposals, including those concerning pay rises and stable prices of socially essential products and rates, housing and public utilities.

Addressing the session of the National Council for Labour and Social Issues 30 December 2010, FTUB President Leonid Kozik said that the previous general agreement had been fulfilled despite some economic difficulties. The new document would, in his opinion, require much more strain to implement than its predecessor.

According to the First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko, the General Agreement was prepared without much friction between the parties. «We proceeded from the real potential of the Belarussian economy and the prospective lines of its development adopted at the 4th All-Belarus Assembly», he explained.

KAZAKHSTAN: LAUNCH OF FILM ABOUT WORKING PEOPLE

The central office of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) launched a documentary film dealing with the situation of working people. The film aims to draw public attention to the issues of social and labour relations, the problems of work collectives, and the need for shaping a positive image of the contemporary worker.

The Kazakhstan trade unions currently organising over two million workers are rightly regarded as the most massive and influential institution of the civil society. Although the country's new trade union movement marked its 20th anniversary in 2010, the first trade union cells appeared in Kazakhstan 105 years ago.

The film was made jointly by the Astana Trade Union Council and the National Youth Media Union with the support of the Ministry of Culture and the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan.

KYRGYZSTAN: WORKERS WIN STRIKE

The strike at the gold mine owned by the Canadian Kumtor Operating Company in Kyrgyzstan has come to a successful end. The trade union organisation and the management have managed to reach an agreement on the workers' demand for a 50 per cent wage raise. All op-

erations at the mine have been resumed (the average annual budget receipts from the Kumtor project account for 10 per cent of the country's GDP).

The union at the enterprise was able to achieve such a result owing to the cohesion, unity and firm stand of the whole work collective. The strikers also received strong support from the Kyrgyzstan Trade Union Federation, industrial unions of the Republic, and Trade Union Internationals. A great number of allied unions in CIS countries also sent their messages of solidarity.

«It's our hope that in the future all conflicts will be settled through negotiations, and the relations between the management and the trade union will be built on the principles of social partnership», said Eldar Tadjibayev, the leader of the country's mining and metallurgical workers union.

MOLDOVA: WHAT'S TO BE DONE TO ESTABLISH DECENT WORK PRINCIPLES

The Confederal Committee of the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) adopted a Declaration on the Promotion of Decent Work which says, among other things, that «to implement the National Decent Work Programme for 2008–2011, Moldova would need to carry out reforms such as will enable her to meet all commitments arising from the ratification of UN and ILO conventions».

The list of measures to be taken by the social partners includes the following:

- adoption of a law on the subsistence minimum;
- establishment of national minimum pay equal to the subsistence minimum;
- settlement of all wage arrears;
- improvement of the machinery for encouraging industrial enterprises to create new jobs, which will help provide employment opportunities for all population categories, especially for young people;
- provision of strict control over the observance of workers' rights in the spheres of health and safety, etc.

RUSSIA: FNPR REJECTS ENSLAVING INNOVATIONS

23 November 2011 the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) issued a statement about the amendments to the Labour Code of the Russian Federation prepared and officially approved by the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP).

The key proposals they made were about introducing a 60-hour work-week, expanding the scope of fixed-term labour contracts, making the procedure of dismissing personnel easier and cheaper for the employers, and reducing the job security for those who combine work with study.

The FNPR Statement expresses the apprehension that the RSPP proposals actually confirm that the employers are willing to unleash a social war in Russia, as they are trying to send workers back to the level of social rights that existed in the middle of the 19th century.

«The Russian unions warn that the existent level of social and labour guarantees cannot be lowered without infringing on the country's Constitution that defines Russia as a social state... In this connection, we demand that the President, the Parliament and the agencies of constitutional supervision take decisive steps to curb the attempts at its violation», the Statement says.

In return, the FNPR suggested that the President and the Government should:

- refuse the flat rate taxation system where both tycoons and low-income workers pay an equal percentage;
- introduce procedures for bankruptcy and external administration for enterprises delaying wages;
- restrict paying dividends to shareholders at companies restraining increases in employees' salaries;
- impose restrictions on the salaries and other payments of top managers through tying their rates to the wages and payments of the lowest-income workers;
- liberalise the strike legislation through shortening the conciliation procedures to five days.

RUSSIA: EXTRAORDINARY FNPR CONGRESS TO OPEN 12 JANUARY 2011

The General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) held its session in Moscow 1 December 2010. Among the invitees were representatives of the Government, the State Duma, and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

The session considered the draft General Agreement for 2011–2013 to be signed by the national trade union centres, the employers' organisations, and the Government of Russia. Speakers in the debate pointed to the divisions that had arisen at the preparatory stage on such fundamental issues as wage rates and reduction of certain social guarantees. Besides, the employers rejected the unions' proposal to ban agency contract labour, while the Government declined considering the establishment of a Ministry of Labour. As a result, the FNPR concluded that the draft agreement was not yet ready for signing. The General Council decided to proceed with the negotiations, and, based on their outcome, determine the feasibility of concluding the agreement. The power to take the decision was delegated to the FNPR Executive Committee.

FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov reported on the preparations for the FNPR 6th Congress that were taking place in an extremely tense atmosphere. The employers had been making deliberate attempts to re-

strict workers' rights by introducing respective changes in the Labour Code of Russia. It was only due to the strong objections by the FNPR that the temporary disability benefits for workers had not been reduced.

Faced with the increasing aggravation of the social and economic situation in the country and with the need for a speedy development of an adequate trade union response, the session took the decision to hold the FNPR 7th Congress ahead of schedule, i.e. 12 January 2011, and, in accordance with the Statute, regard the congress as extraordinary.

The General Council considered several other current issues of FNPR activity.

RUSSIA: PRESIDENT MEETS UNION LEADERS AGAIN

On the 15th of December 2010, President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev met with the leaders of trade union organisations affiliated with the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR). The union delegation was headed by FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov.

The talks dwelt on the labour market situation, the training of skilled personnel, the contemporary migration policy, and the necessity of Russia's accession to the international safety and health conventions.

The President of Russia invited the unions to take part in the re-estab-

lishment of the vocational training system dismantled over the past decades, and in monitoring the creation of new jobs in the regions. He believes the country's labour market must be more civilised and the recruitment of foreign workers should not be to detriment of Russian citizens. He also spoke against tight linkage of Russian workers' wages (which he called low) to productivity.

RUSSIA: GENERAL ACCORD SIGNED

A new General Agreement for 2011–2013 has been signed by the national trade union centres, the employers' organisations, and the Government of Russia 29 December 2010.

The Agreement establishes the general principles of regulating the social and labour relations and economic relations associated with them at the federal level. The draft text of the new agreement was developed throughout the year 2010 as part of the activities of the Tripartite Commission for Regulating the Social and Labour Relations.

Prime Minister of Russia Vladimir Putin took part in the signing ceremony. The document is expected to promote stable employment, the development of an efficient labour market infrastructure, the training of skilled labour, secure jobs, and the implementation of social and economic policies that would improve the quality of life of workers and their families and provide social protection for the population.

Creating the conditions for economic recovery in the post-crisis period and increased labour productivity are also among the priorities of the Agreement.

«This is the second such General Agreement in the history of the new Russia that has been signed without disagreements between the parties», said Vladimir Putin upon signing the document. «Its preparation required a lot of pains-taking efforts by all the stakeholders. It was a real hard job to coordinate positions, with all the arguments and controversies, and sometimes even ultimatums, but we have managed to bring it to its logical conclusion. We've shown that this country has a well-functioning, civilised and efficient mechanism of regulating labour relations'.

According to the document, the minimum wages will be raised by 6.5 per cent as from 1 June 2011, and will amount to 4,611 roubles a month.

UKRAINE: UNIONS INSISTING ON NATIONAL SAFETY & HEALTH STRATEGY

The situation with work-related injuries and occupational diseases in Ukraine has critically aggravated. Over the last five years, more than five thousand workers were killed and 85 thousand injured in their workplaces. The fatal injuries rate has considerably exceeded the corresponding average in European countries. The share of people employed in hazardous work conditions has risen up to 30 per cent, and the

number of newly identified occupational diseases has been increasing constantly (6–7 thousand cases a year). The result is that the economy has been losing its skilled labour potential together with billions-worth means from the state budget and social insurance funds.

In the absence of strict liability, employers are saving on health and safety and are not interested in taking measures to prevent eventual equipment breakdowns or occupational accidents. During the past 19 years, the country's system of workers' health care was dismantled. Should the deterioration of workers' health continue at the current rate, the needs of key industries in workforce will only be met by a mere 40–45 per cent in 2015–2020. This may undermine the economic growth perspectives outlined by Ukraine's new authorities.

Given the enormity of the problem, the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU)* appealed to the country's President Viktor Yanukovich to instruct the Cabinet of Ministers and the National Academy of Sciences to develop a national safety and health strategy in conjunction with the trade unions and the employers' organisations.

The result was that President Yanukovich had requested that the Government make a comprehensive analysis of today's system of occu-

* At the request of our Ukrainian colleagues, we substitute the Ukrainian-based acronym «FPU» for the former English-based «FTUU».

pational safety and health and, with the involvement of all stakeholders, prepare proposals for its radical reform.

UKRAINE: GENERAL AGREEMENT FOR 2010–12 CONCLUDED

A General Agreement for 2010–2012 on regulating the basic principles and standards in the implementation of social and economic policies and labour relations in Ukraine was signed in Kyiv 13 November 2010.

Attending the ceremony were Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, FPU President Vasyl Khara, the leaders of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and the joint representative body of the employers.

The work on the draft document lasted for more than seven months, and the unions believe its signing was an important contribution to the promotion of social dialogue in Ukraine. The new General Agreement is a compromise reached by the bargaining parties who managed, through negotiation, to find solutions to acute social problems acceptable both for the unions and for the employers.

UKRAINE: FPU CRITICAL OF NEW TAX CODE

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) issued a statement 26 November 2010 on the situation that had emerged in the country following the adoption by the Supreme Rada of a new tax code.

According to the FPU, «a tax code must help reduce corruption in the economy, eliminate social inequality on the basis of redistribution of incomes from the rich to the poor, eradicate poverty in the country, promote employment, improve the pension system, and, finally, balance the interests of the citizens, the government and the business».

However, the tax code adopted by the Supreme Rada 18 November 2010 does not provide the full solution to the above tasks. The tax burden reduction it stipulates will have a positive effect only on big and medium-sized businesses. Simultaneously, millions of Ukrainian citizens employed in small businesses will be faced up with the threat of losing their jobs, while the significant restraints imposed by the new tax code will strip them of the possibility of earning a living by their own labour.

The unfulfilled expectations of part of the population for an equitable taxation system gave rise to the mass disagreement campaigns throughout Ukraine that culminated in the public protest and solidarity action launched by small businesses on Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv 22 November 2010.

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine supported the main claims put forward by the protestors and called on the Ukrainian authorities to pay heed to the demands of dozens of thousands of citizens and «to find ways to address the requirements of a considerable portion of society».

PUBLISHED BY
GCTU INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
GCTU PUBLIC RELATIONS CENTRE
42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
119119 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(495) 938-2155
PHONE +7(495) 938-0112
Web site: www.vkp.ru;
E-mail: inter@vkp.ru

THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS, GCTU, IS AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATION THAT WAS FOUNDED AT ITS FIRST CONGRESS ON 16 APRIL 1992.

ITS CONSTITUTION, WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE FIRST CONGRESS, WAS AMENDED AND SUPPLEMENTED BY THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 18 SEPTEMBER 1997, AND THE FIFTH (EXTRAORDINARY) CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 26 MARCH 2004.

THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GCTU ARE:

- CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' ACTIVITIES ON THE PROTECTION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WORKERS, STUDENTS AND PENSIONERS;
- ASSISTANCE IN THEIR PROTECTION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND GUARANTEES;
- AND
- ORGANISING TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY AND CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' INTERNATIONAL POLICIES.

THE GCTU BUILDS ITS ACTIVITIES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR ITS AFFILIATES' COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE AND THE EQUALITY OF THEIR RIGHTS AND DUTIES.
THE GCTU AFFILIATES NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTRES OF ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN AND UKRAINE, AND ALSO 30 INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR AFFILIATION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS AND EURASEC INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT, THE CIS INTERSTATE ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, ETC.

INTERNATIONALLY, IT IS IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE ILO , THE UN DPI AND THE ECOSOC.

THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED EVERY FIVE YEARS, AND, IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CONGRESSES, THE COUNCIL AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

CONTROL OVER FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES IS EXERCISED BY THE GCTU AUDITING COMMISSION.

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS MIKHAIL SHMAKOV,
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

DEAR READERS

The GCTU information bulletin "Inform-Contact" is also distributed by E-mail. Apart from that, the English and French versions of our publication are available on our web site: www.vkp.ru